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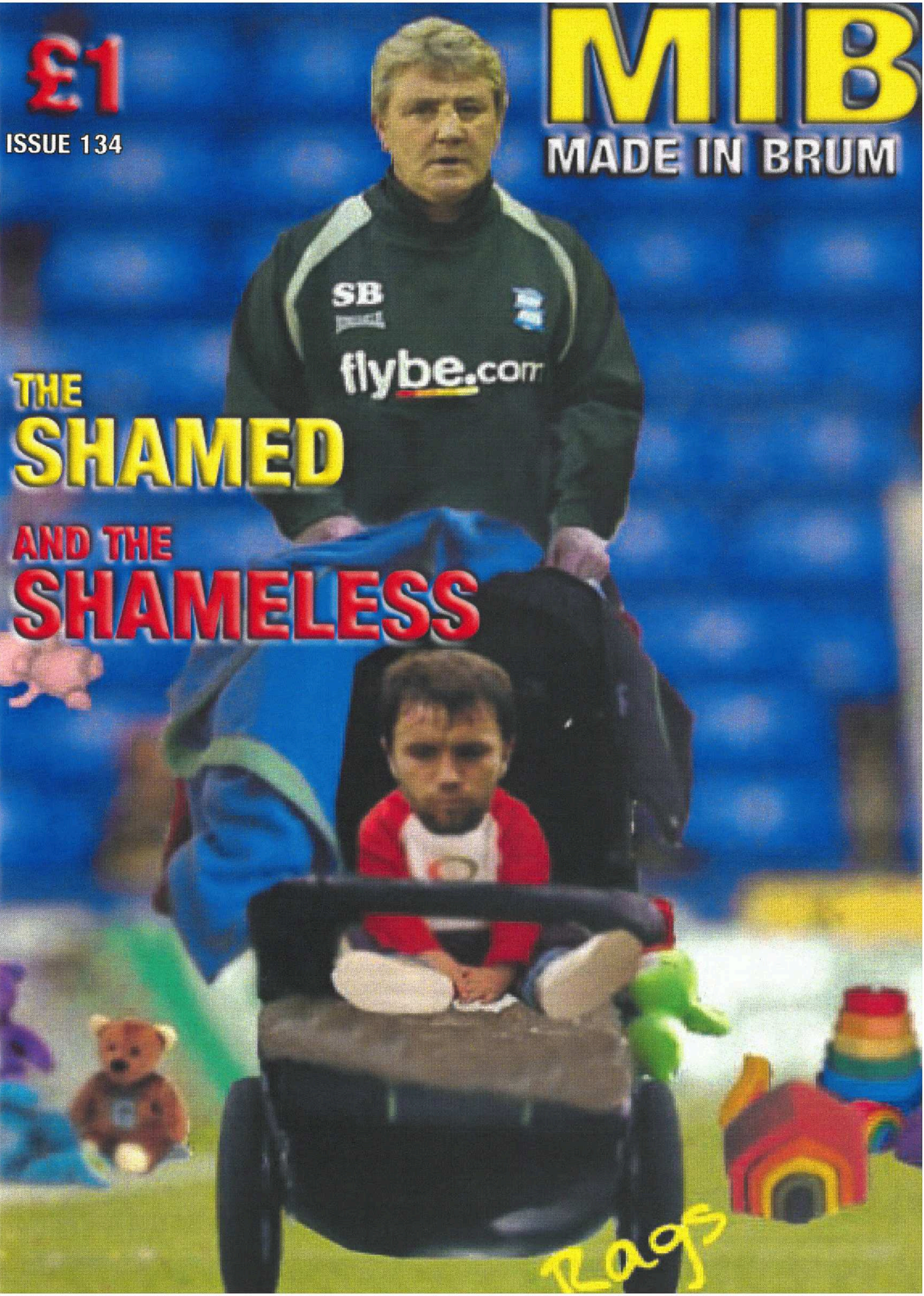
ISSUE 134

MIB
MADE IN BRUM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THE SHAMED AND THE SHAMELESS

Rags

MIB

MADE IN BRUM - MATCHDAY FANZINE

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Issue 134 - Season 2006/07

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CONTRIBUTIONS

Contributions are always welcome.

If you have something to say, or something to get off your chest, please write in, or email. This is your fanzine.

MIB is always after regular contributions from Bluenoses

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MATCH REPORTS
BY RON SINGING THE BLUES

TALKING BLUE

A BIG LONG MOAN FROM START TO FINNISH.

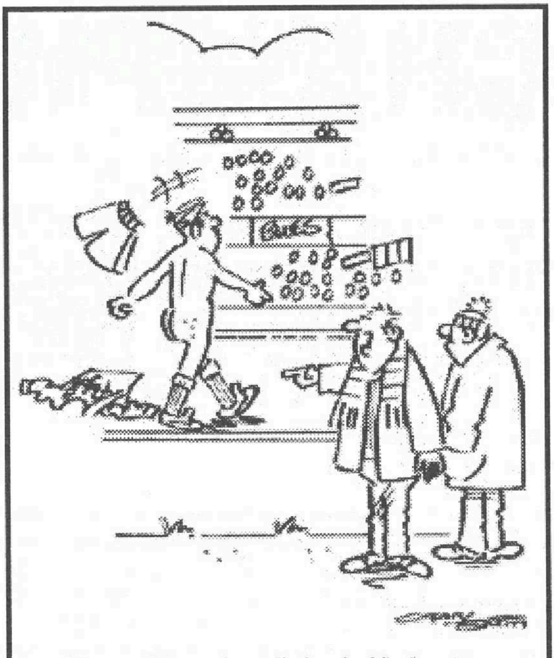
One thing is for certain about our beloved Blues, nothing is straightforward, there has to be great big hiccups along the way, and I suppose we shouldn't have a song with the words "Tired &Weary" and "Though the Way be Long" because our journey, the one of supporting Blues is just that, tiring, wearying and very, very long. Although to be fair, spanners are always thrown in the works to ruin the steady running of our ship.

When we all think that things are going to pick up, something happens to batter us back down again. Just look at our game at Cardiff a couple of weeks ago. Now you would have thought that after that great win against Palarse, in which we did play some very good football, was then quickly followed by a Carling cup win against Shrewsbury, we'd be well up for a top of the table clash against a very ordinary Cardiff team. No disrespect to the Welsh team but if you look at their squad and then ours, we should be going to places like Ninian Park and steam-rolling teams like that. Instead they battered us good and proper all over that pitch, from front to back they were up for it so much more than our lot. So, this brings me to ask the question "WHY?"

Until the Palarse game we Bluenoses have had to witness some dire, boring, inept displays void of tactics from undoubtedly skilful players. Allegedly, we have got a very strong squad packed with quality players (on paper), a bit like last season really. So what is going wrong? As you will all know by now, I've lost total respect and confidence in Brucie. He may be a "Nice Bloke" and "Well Respected" in football circles, but he has totally lost the plot as manager of our club. I really do hope that he can turn it around and the displays get better. Yes, the results have been good and we are in 4th position. So it says a lot when a lot of Bluenoses are dissatisfied with what is going on at Stan's. That's what makes it so hard to say that we need to get rid of Bruce, because he seems like a nice bloke and if he was an arse and a horrible individual it would be easy to want him sacked, but it has got to happen. Throughout last season I was expecting things to improve, but as time flew by and things got worse, something should have been done to save our sinking ship. The board cannot let the same situation go on for too long this season. I know its almost impossible to give Bruce the sack while we are winning and in a good position. So far our team has had some fantastic luck. Beating Colchester, getting a win at Sunderland, a last minute win against Palarse, even the draw at Stoke was lucky. That luck will run out, and some crap team is going to spank us at Stan's. That is when I think then the crowd will turn, and turn very nasty.

You can just sense it that it will kick off after a bad result and there'll be no going back. Every home game if something goes wrong, a bad pass or we go one down, that'll be it, the boo boys will take over. So, be warned our illustrious board, once the majority turn on Bruce, that in turn will affect the players (it may already have affected some) and things will quickly deteriorate.

Being my optimistic self, and even after a really crap performance, like the one at Cardiff, and most of last seasons for that matter, I think it'll be better today. We will come out and play some fantastic football and whip Hull City 4-0!!! I'm going to have to go to see a doctor about this optimism. At my time in life, and supporting the Blues since 1968 you would have thought I would have become a total pessimist by now.



Whoaa...Johnson's really lost it this time...

There is, of course a lot more moans to have about our club, or to be more exact, the way it's being run. It's not all down to Bruce, his tactics (or lack of them) his players and their lack of fight. Of course, if a player were to read my last statement he would probably take offence and I would expect that. Even from the most laziest, good for nothing, high earning, money grabbing mercenary! To say that today's professional footballers come from a different planet would be an understatement, they come from a different galaxy!

I'll explain my reasoning for that. If any of you have been watching "Big Ron Manager"? It's about Ron Atkinson going to Peterborough and trying to help them get promoted last season, not as a manager but as a troubleshooter. In the first episode it was recommended that the players went into a factory to see how mundane and boring it is for the clubs supporters to work there and how lucky they are to be professional footballers. Even before they get out of the factory most players were laughing and joking and looking so uninterested by everything around them. Then in the second episode after another bad result, the manager was having a rant at them in the dressing room about their lack of fight. Two players, one being Sean St Ledger (who we were linked with) took exception to what the manager had to say, which to me shows total lack of respect by the players in question. So, even lower league players couldn't give a damn about where the fans of their club work and what they have to do to get the money to buy match tickets and pay their astronomical wages. No, they just live in their own little world not giving a flying fuck about anybody or anything else.

Here endeth my editorial moan and rant . I'll try to look on the bright side or I will just sit down read through that season ticket begging letter that the board sent us all. What did it say? "More Fun, More Excitement & More Goals" That'll cheer me up!!!!
So until the next rant, remember to Keep the Faith, Keep Right On and Have a Good Un.

Big Dave Thomas

Thanks to Rags Mahone of Small Heath Alliance for the front cover artwork

CHAMPIONSHIP PREVIEWS

BY Block5Babe

Tiger Tiger, Playing Sh*te, in the fishnets of the night

(Hull Freezes Over Preview by Block5Babe)

Who's that one in the middle Dad..?

Much (oh ok a teensie weensie bit) has been made of Nicky Forster's move to Fishmongers Paradise. Let's face it, he can't be much of a catch, he used to play for us! [Note to editor: Repeat previous 2 sentences please, inserting Craig Fagan for NF. Ta!] A trawl on the official website, however reveals Nicky Barmby, who is an ex-England international, so clearly there is at least one bigger fish amongst the minnows. A defender called Alton Towers (or very similar) should make it a fun day.

Call Me Mr...

Up until recently, it was Peter Taylor, one of the most underrated managers in England, IMO, but I won't carp on and on. Now, it's Phil Parkinson, who deserves credit for propelling Colchester into the Fizzy Pop League but clearly felt he had bigger fish to fry.

Removes 99% of Scum...

A sad sad day for us Noses, Deadly calls time on his tenancy at the Mansion House. But surely only our inbred neighbours could be acquired by a trainee porn star. At least he looks a tad more normal (as much as Yanks can of course) than the Glazer shoal. A decent manager, club coffers brimming over with dollars...the only way is? Well, for the 12-Toes, it's like Christmas has come early, but for the rest of us, it's going to be even more fun taking the fish, sorry piss, out of them when they reach their usual giddy heights of 16th.

Guess the gate

Attendances have been mixed down at Stans, I fear we have all had too many years of Prem quality matches to be prepared to shell out £25 and above for vastly inferior fare. I'm not being a Prawnie, but I ask you...£45 to watch Chelski or £29 to watch Leicester.. I rest my case! I can't see our gates being above 25,000 save for derbies and very attractive cup ties, can you? This one will struggle to reach even 20,000 I'd say. At least it gives your correspondent the opportunity to spread her outsized backside over two seats.

Been there, done that....

Had to find space somewhere to praise Amber Nectar, the unofficial Hull fanzine site, which contains much tongue in cheek humour. On merchandising: "Tee shirts! Mugs! Pens! We have none!!..One day we may show some discipline and spend the fanzine's profits on some lovely merchandise instead of placing it in the till of the Three Tuns" On back issues: "Issue Two..free if you send us an SAE. Don't get too excited, it's pretty shit". Back to the matter in hand, we have been pretty successful in recent times, on the comparatively rare occasions we have played them. Still, like most teams they did stuff us comprehensively once in the past, 7-0 I believe it was in the Editor's first year as a season ticket holder (1909-10)

And the lucky winner is...?

They are bottom of the league, say they are bottom of the league. So, all we have to do is score goals. Sounds so easy doesn't it? As long as Bartender and Larceny continue the good work, we should however achieve **2-0** [This week's preview was brought to you by Fishmongers' Monthly..If you don't understand, just go to Hull and breathe in...]

Hi ho Silver and away..

(Quite Possibly Raving Preview by Block5Babe)

Who's that one in the middle Dad..?

Well, let's give up and go home, eh? The Hoops (apparently that is their moniker) have got Tommy Docherty on their books. I thought he was dead, but then again with some of the movement we get from our players, that thought has crossed the vast and empty expanses of my brain before... Still, what more could we ask but for Sicknote Mark I to put a brace past us. Personally, I thought when (big hint WHEN) he was on the pitch, Furlong was a half decent player. A look down their squad list also reveals the exotically named Egutu Oliseh, surely a winning hand at Scrabble with a rack full of vowels if ever I saw one.

Call Me Mr...

Some geezer called Gary Waddock is the Lone Ranger for the moment apparently, having been handed the poison chalice after Holloway declared that the blackspot on his roses needed full time attention. In recent times there have been all sorts of shenanigans down Loftus way, particularly off the pitch: blackmail, violence, bullet-proof vests....ooh, it's just like a night out with the Mulveys. Even our Trev took a turn at management down there, but didn't set the world alight – now there's a surprise!

Removes 99% of Scum...

Watching the tickertape under the pictures on the concourse TV at the Theatre of Prawns yesterday, I saw the unbelievable claim by MON that Vile have the capability of pushing Chelsea all the way. Only if the Londoners' team bus breaks down, and they decide to use Smugberg's head to push, surely. Credit where credit is grudgingly due, though, they have looked like a better team since the new Irishman arrived. Though that's a bit like saying I look better in a subdued light... pretty bleeding obvious, eh?

Your tour operator recommends...

You start now if you are driving, as West London is to trouble free driving what Vanessa Feltz is to Weightwatchers. Those of you partial to a beer may wish to try the Springbok, not as pretentious as many Lahndan boozers, so you may get change out of a fiver for your pint. It's also so close to the ground, that even I can manage the walk without more than a little moan.

Been there, done that....

Actually, no I haven't, well not really, cos the only time I went to Loftus Road, Fulham were squatting there. It might have been fun watching them in the eras of Gerry Francis, Vinnie Jones and Rodney Marsh. Not a place for the faint of heart, you'd have thought. We've certainly had the beating of them in the past, though the last time we crossed swords there were two somewhat tedious 0-0 draws to savour.

And the lucky winner is...?

These are the sort of away matches we need to win if we are to be there or thereabouts come the end of the season. Night matches in the Smoke aren't usually our forte – Wet Spam last February, anyone? And week night matches tends to reduce the level of travelling support. And...hold on a minute, any more excuses and I'll be turning into Wor Brucie. Positive thinking, gal **1-0**

THE SHAME

Before I start, I've just got to say that all the blame for what happened during the Crystal Palace game lays at the feet of Steve Bruce. The way he decided the order of the substitutions, the was he changed track on whether to play safe and hang on for the draw and then to change and go for the win. As you all know, one of these substitutions (Forssell on for DJ) stirred some anger amongst supporters and especially DJ himself. Although the crowds reaction to the substitution has been described as 'ironic cheering', DJ took exception to it and threw his toys out of the pram. This incident could have ruined DJ's career at Blues, it was Steve Bruce's incorrect decision that sparked the fury and it seems he's not even man enough to admit it, but instead has chosen to blame us, the fans for not really understanding the game. Though to be fair, the so called Blues supporters who sang "Damien Johnson, what a wanker" didn't really come out of all this in a good light. So first I will give you my slant on it, and then try to analyse Steve Bruce's thoughts, his actions and DJ's.

To say that I felt sick to the stomach when the DJ controversy unfolded would be an understatement. What happened on that pitch when DJ was substituted was bound to happen sooner or later, if not on that day then later on, which proves that there is something drastically wrong with our club from the very top to the bottom. The affinity that used to exist between the so-called 110% players who gave their all and the fans who excused their mistakes and lack of ability was completely blown out of the water that day, and again here it's down to Bruce.

DJ - In his defence.

Lets start with what happened, and I've got to make this perfectly clear that what DJ did by first throwing down his captains arm band and then the shirt was well out of order. What he did was rubbish what Bruce had given (the captain's armband) him, and I couldn't believe that he did what he did. I suppose you've got to be in his shoes really to understand his actions, so lets just do that. Here, we have a player that has ALWAYS given his all. He may not be the most talented of players, and it seems he is not the brightest of individuals. So when he heard the cheering his heart must have been broken. What must have gone through this players mind when the board was held up with his number on and all he could hear was cheering. He must have thought "why the hell do I bother, running for 90 minutes giving my all?" What he just didn't get was that most of the cheers,

ED AND THE SHAMELESS!!!

and I would say around 80% of those cheering were doing it ironically. Because to be fair, no one in St. Andrews could understand the substitutions. I know I couldn't. One minute it seemed Bruce had decided on safety, then with his next he changed track completely. Yes it worked, but lets be fair, that was the second "get out of jail card" used up this season.

DJ has of course apologized. He says he did not understand that the cheering was done in an ironic way. When he heard the cheers he thought that the supporters did not want him on the pitch, which he says "hurt him very much" and any Bluenose with any ounce of humanity, would say "okay, you did wrong, you've apologized so lets all move on" Let's hope then that the silent majority can out cheer those that will never forgive. Those moronic idiots are the ones that seem to be heard more these days, more than the true supporters; the Bluenoses who DON'T boo their team, and not the moronic fools who moan at and abuse our own players if they make one mistake. For instance, like the twat who was sat behind me shouting

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BLUENOSE VIEWS TAKEN FROM MESSAGE BOARDS

By evanio

Having been a supporter since the mid-seventies it pains me to admit that the support at St Andrews over the last three years has been fucking woeful. St Andrews used to be a place which was bursting with passion, atmosphere albeit laced with grim humour.
Now, it's like a morgue, unless we either score or most likely moan and whinge when things aren't going well.

Against Colchester I remember looking at my watch after hearing the first murmurings of discontent and it was ten past three!.

Today again, I've sat amongst white trash who scream out complete and utter garbage (ie, Try jumping you fucking lazy long streak of Danish shit) and continue throughout the whole game screaming and swearing at the players and manager, then jump around hugging each other like apes after the winner goes in.

And who was it who said that good old working class Brummies will forgive any short comings a player may have, as long as he gives a 100%? Well I can't think of many players who have given more effort in recent years than Damien Johnson, and the ironic cheers that followed his substitution were an embarrassment to the history of St Andrews support. To think the likes of Melchiot, Sutton and Heskey can just fuck off, after earning millions out of the club and not putting 50% of DJ's efforts into helping the club stay up. All the fans who say he should never wear the shirt again should look in the mirror and ask if they've put in the same amount of effort while supporting the team.

So it's a 100 years of football at St Andrews, I can only remember 35 years, but even in the dark Wheldon days of 4k crowds, the support was miles better than the poxy effort most the whinging gits managed today. We can't even be arsed to raise a Bruce out chant.

"Johnson, you're a f******g w*****r, the c**t. who soon shut up when I said to him, "you're the f*****g w*****r". What has gone wrong with our club? We used to take the piss out of Vile supporters because of their incessant moaning and whinging at their own team, and now some of our own are worse than they are.

THE FANS - FOR AND AGAINST

As I've said before, what happened, was bound to happen sooner rather than later. It seems things just aren't right with the supporters of Birmingham City Football Club. Once upon a time, we knew we were crap, we yearned for success, and if that success ever happened to descend over Stan's, we would enjoy it. You only have to go back to our Worthington Cup run to the final and then our first season in the Premier. It was bliss, and we all enjoyed it as if we would never have success again. Then it all started to go pear- shaped. Even in our second season in the top flight things started to turn nasty. I can remember fans auguring and almost coming to blows in the Tilton before Christmas and we were in fourth or fifth place! Most of the fans where I sat were newer fans who often didn't like standing up and singing. Even though we were winning, a lot of older fans weren't happy and as well as some of the newer fans, there was dissent. But why?
Perhaps it was the high prices and boring football? It might have been that most Bluenoses thought we would have our one season of highs, and even though Blues were winning it just was not in a Blues fans psyche to be supporting a winning team!!!
I just don't really know why things are wrong, but they are. Perhaps Blues fans are happier in a lower league although if that Saturday against Palarse is anything to go by, the answer to that one is NO.
I have heard a lot of comments made about some young Blues supporters; we've all

heard the word "CHAVS" and it seems that a lot of the modern day young Blues fans are just that - Chavs. We all know what these young people allegedly do in their every day life. They hang around doing f**k all, be it in shopping centres or on street corners, and that is where I wish they would stay and not come down the Blues. I've had the misfortune to have been seated behind a few last season. It was the Charlton match, we lost but actually played very well in the second half. At the final whistle, these Chavs started to boo along, with a minority of others, but most Noses appreciated the display, effort and clapped the team off the pitch. As soon as this happened, these Chavs looked around and saw everyone was clapping, so they stopped booing and started to clap as well. This just about summed up how f**king thick they were.

What happened though when DJ was substituted and then threw his wobbly, really summed up how much our support has changed over the seasons. Once, the support we Bluenoses gave our team was respected and revered around the country. Now, when away supporters come to Stan's, they take the piss out of our support. Although, It's just as bad at away games but again I've got to say this must have something to do with the deep rooted things that are wrong at our club. Be it how it is run from the top, the management at player level or the resentments that the fans now have at some players and their astronomical wages. I don't know what is wrong, but there is something.

MORE BLUENOSE VIEWS

By adam-n-eve

DJ should know better, but at least the fecker showed some passion. It fecked me right off that people have the gall to boo him. Have these people forgotten that less than four months ago we were awash with players who couldn't, and wouldn't give a shite about the blues shirt?

DJ has given 110% every season since we got him and today he was a victim of Bruce's inept tactics. The first substitution was a joke and unless Nafti was suffering from a knock, why take him off? In fact why take anyone off? At that time, there was only ever going to be one winner. Palarse were doing nothing as DJ and Nafti were snuffing out any threat and Dunn and McSheffrey were linking up great. But oh no, Bruce has to tinker. So he takes off our most influential player in my opinion and not even in a straight swap. He then had to make another two subs to cover the mess he had made with the first!

DJ should not have thrown his armband or the shirt away. BUT, he was only expressing I think, what the vast majority of supporters were feeling at that time.

Fine him. make him apologize. maybe even strip him of the captaincy, but the c***s who sang 'Damien Johnson what a wanker' really need to fecking look at the players who have worked without any praise from the fans, and think to themselves about how they would have reacted under such a fecking clown as Bruce.

The blame lies firmly at the door of Bruce and his tactical naivety. I'm sure he will say that as we won his substitutions were justified, but we should and would have strolled the game without any substitutions, or change of formation.

Anyway rant over, it's been a long, long day and I'm fecked.

All I can tell you is how I feel about the club that I love. The foot-balling side hasn't been right for the past two seasons and as I'm an old-timer, I've not really liked most footballers for some time. I remember when players mixed with supporters, they drank in pubs and not in exclusive wine bars. They were paid a fair wage which was still a lot more then the average working class man or woman who went to matches. But they weren't celebrities, they didn't buy mansions and they certainly didn't wear diamond encrusted earrings that cost £10,000 a pair! If it was a Blues player, they lived in a detached house in Sheldon or Solihull and drove a Rover (Leyland back then). Supporters had an affinity with players and they were approachable. Not now though.

Blues used to have a supporters club which was run by supporters from the ground. It used to be in the Railway end. There was a bar there, a club you could join and feel a part of. Now if there's any room to open a bar, it's for the prawnies, the executives. Oh yes, those that get a 10% discount when we get relegated! The season ticket holders don't. get anything other than a promise of a 20% discount next season but that's because of all the discounts that were given on match day tickets last season. That is until season ticket sales were down and then the offer is soon open to everyone, whether you're an existing season ticket holder or not.

So, in a nutshell, there's a lot of disgruntled Blues fans at the moment. But to sing a derogatory song about the captain is way off the mark. Can it ever go back to the good old day's? I doubt it very much, which saddens me. I just hope I don't feel as sick as I felt when DJ was substituted against Palarse.

THE MANAGER AND HIS MIS-MANAGEMENT

All that has happened, I put down to Steve Bruce. As I've already stated, he could have ruined a players career with his mad substitutions, and he hasn't got the balls to admit it. No, all he does is blame us. We don't understand football it seems. I think Brucie should take a long hard look at himself in the mirror, because I think he's trying to kid himself. In the Palarse match, he took off the forward because he thought it best we get the draw. When the gasps and then the rumblings started he tried to get himself out of the corner he'd backed himself into. So when he'd run out of options there was only one thing left for him to do, and poor old DJ got the brunt of it. Yes, there are Noses that just don't like Damien Johnson, and perhaps some of the cheers were not of the ironic sort., but that's down to the fact that we've got some right arses that now support the Blues. Let's look at the facts, over the seasons, we've had some right donkeys who've pulled on the Royal Blue shirt of the team we love. Back in the nineties we probably had our worst ever squad. Did Blues supporters turn on those players, did they pick out individuals and boo them? I'd say no to that. We had players like Ricky Otto, now to say he was crap for us is being kind to him, he was awful, but did Noses turn on him? NO. Then we get a player like Gronkjaer. He came into a new team which Bruce had bought in five or six new players. Blues started off the season badly, the whole team weren't playing particularly well, yet one player gets it in the neck and is hounded out. The reason is that our support has changed ever so quickly. No problem, because if nothing else, all Blues fans expect is 100% effort and then they will excuse anything? Well, no, not even that old chestnut is viable now. Because if it was, true Blues supporters would all love Damien Johnson for the 100% he puts in.

Perhaps the title of this article should have been "The Problems at our Club" because there are many and they're big ones. But the Shamed and the Shameless will suffice, the shamed being Damien Johnson, and the Shameless being Steve Bruce for not admitting he got it wrong, in fact for admitting he got everything right!!!

SQUAD PAGE

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12	Mehdi Nafti
13	Colin Doyle
14	D J Campbell
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16	Olivier Tebily
17	Neil Danns
18	Samuel Oji
20	Marcos Painter
21	Bruno N`Gotty
22	Damien Johnson
23	Mathew Birley
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Stuart Elliott
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Craig Fagan

BIRMINGHAM CITY LADIES

NEXT HOME MATCH

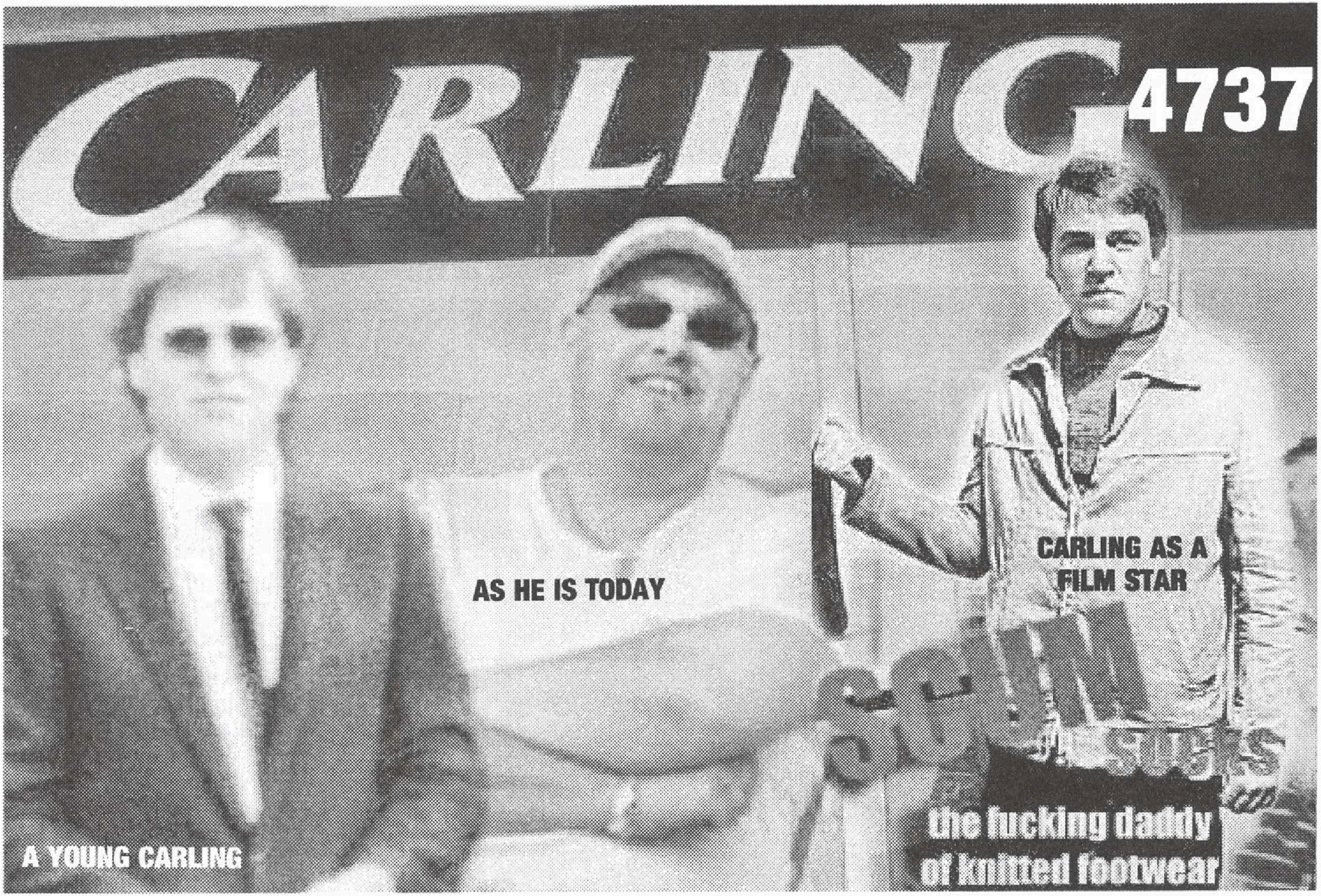
Sunday 10th Sept vs Stockport 2pm kickoff

League Cup

Ground Details: Redditch United FC From Redditch Town Centre.

On town centre ring road take Access 7, then follow the road round to the left and turn right into Church Road, then right again passing the church on the left and the railway station on the right.

Go straight on through the traffic lights. The ground entrance is 400 yards on the right on the brow of the hill (look for the Hill View Surgery at the top of the drive of the club).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4737
A YOUNG CARLING
AS HE IS TODAY
CARLING AS A FILM STAR
the fucking daddy of knitted footwear

THE GABBIE CABBIE'S

BIRMINGHAM CITY MOMENT

Blues 2 Hull City 0

Well, we're back to Birmingham City nil as once again our virgin strikers fail to score,
Crap result against Cardiff and if we are going up, these are the games that we need at least a draw,
Eleven million spent on the Forse, Jerome and McSheffrey, yet it was only the latter at Cardiff that started,
Albeit on the wing; and crap defending was punished as once more our fans travelled home beaten and downhearted

Mind you, they loved Ninian Park so much that a few f them decided to take it back to Brum,
That wasn't no return to the dark days I heard one say, it was just a harmless piece of fun,
Well today, surely even our virgin strikers are gonna score and of that I'm sure they will,
It's gonna be the mighty Blues 2 and the toothless Tigers 0

Follow Birmingham City ladies on WWW.BCLFC.COM

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John Lewis of Solihull " the Kings of Touchwood"

Gabbie Cabbie's Trivia Question: Who was the smallest captain since the war, to lift the F.A. Cup?

A WELCOME IN

The M5 was like caravan city and Strensham services was so full of parked up caravans that I decided to pass through to the M50 on a sunny morning on my way to Cardiff. I was meeting a work mate in Dempsey's bar in Cardiff, on his recommendation as he is a Cardiff boyo. it was a typical pretend Irish bar and a few Blues fans were in there at 11.30. As I strolled in for a beer with my mate and his brother, Dubai Dan turned up, having flown in the day before to see the Blues (that's dedication for you), with his brothers and as we chatted and 'necked a couple' of beers as kick off time was quickly approaching. The eight of us jumped in a minicab and we were soon at the ground, and it only cost £6 between us (I think I owe someone, as I didn't pay!). Walking to the ground amongst the Cardiff supporters, we could hear how excited they all were about meeting the Blues in a 'top of the table clash', I hoped the Blues were up for it as my Cardiff mate Steve, told me that the whole of Cardiff had been revving up for this all week, and they were expecting a full house for the first time in years and having a record amount of away fans.

As expected there was a heavy police presence and once inside the ground the noise from the Cardiff fans confirmed that they were indeed revved up, singing 'Men of Horlicks', well that was what it sounded like! (apparently, 'a la the vile' someone printed out the words and distributed them in a pub). The Blues fans responded with KRO and some chants about the fabled occupation that Welshmen have with Sheep! The Zulu chant went up a couple of times during men of Horlicks, which I thought was funny. I bumped into Welsh Bluenose Slammer, who travels up to Brum to watch games, so this was a bit of a luxury for him!

The players were announced and I listened out for the booing for 'jonty', I didn't hear any but I didn't hear much applause for him either, so I think the Blues fans are waiting and watching to see how he reacts. Ninian Park is an old ground and we were in an old shed. Part of the stand, next to the away end is obscured by a black screen to stop those closest seeing (and more importantly throwing things at the home fans), but it was great to stand up.

I parked myself at the front of the terracing in the sunshine. I was speaking to some Bluenoses who had come on the early train that had arrived about 10.30ish. They had been wrapped up by loads of police and walked around Cardiff for 20 minutes before being put in the ground!! Can

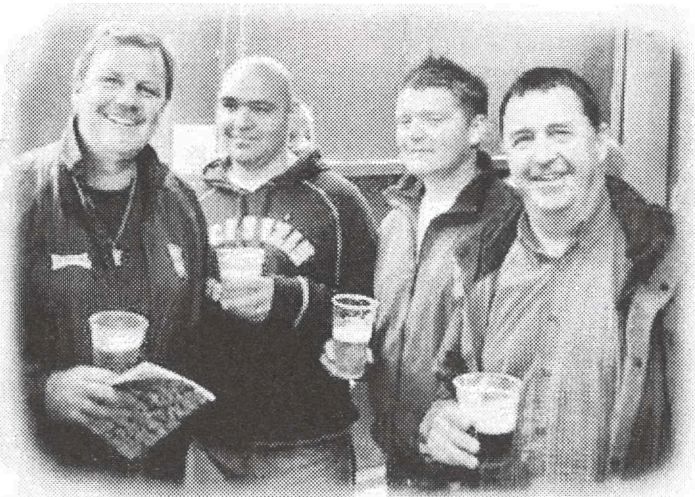
THE HILLSIDE
CARDIFF AWAY

you believe that? Herded into a shed of a ground, hours before kick off! Some asked to get out of the escort and it depended on what you looked like or which copper you asked as to whether one was able to slip out for a more civilised couple of hours in the Welsh capital.

The game started at a 100 miles an hour; let me change that, Cardiff started at a 100 miles an hour. Blues were second to every ball and nervous back passes to Doyle by both full backs made him nervous, and most of his clearances went into touch or straight to a blue shirt (unfortunately we were playing in black). From giving away a silly corner, the bluebirds scored and their fans got behind their team urging them to press Blues back. Blues didn't help by having no width and seemingly unable to string two passes together. The main body of Zulu's arrived just after we went behind as they had a pre-arranged meeting with the Soul Crew in Newport and as they strolled in they were a pretty intimidating sight. There were well over 200 of them and many old faces. The riot police that came in with them and those who were outside had had some sort of 'to do' outside the Cardiff end and camera's and video's were aimed at us (I say 'us' as most of them stood by me on the far left of our section). A helicopter was buzzing overhead and mounted bobbies trotted about outside the gate. Some famous Zulu's (or is that infamous?) that have been on TV and written books were put in police vans and given a 'stiff talking to'.

A couple of stewards tried to move some of the 'lads' away from the steps next to me, but they soon gave up and some of the Zulu's chatted about whatever was going to happen later and paid scant attention to the game. A bloke with a camera was taking pictures (what else would he do, with a camera?) of the crowd, nothing wrong with that I suppose, except he was wearing a pink high visibility jacket and needless to say he came in for some stick from the Blues fans.

At half time the 3rd world toilet facilities were given a hammering by the Blues fans and the beer shed also was seeing record attendances. A bit of fine rain didn't deter me from my open air spot. The Blues subs were at our end during half time and Forssell gave us the funniest moment by tripping over



SPIRIT

Lounge

NRAL

himself in the penalty box. The second half got under way still at 100 mile an hour by the bluebirds. Blues had a couple of golden opportunities to equalise. First DJC hit the goalie and then Jerome did the same and it was looking like it was not going to be our day.

The sun was now blazing and the bluebirds fans were giving their full support to their team. Our support was good, however when most of your support are 'lads' waiting for the end of the game... I don't think singing is their strong point!
There seemed to be some sort of a 'to do' further into the Blues section near the home fans and as I was so far away I couldn't tell you what it was. I did see large groups of riot police slipping in through the gates by the third world toilets and also appearing from the shed/stand next to us just as Cardiff got their second, and some Blues headed for the exit, no way!

The riot police started to push Blues fans from the open area back into the stand, and some were enjoying the situation far too much. Some Blues fans were getting a bit uptight, especially a few who had already been in the ground for hours. Something was happening in the section between the home and away fans and again I couldn't see. I was 'ushered' forcibly back by a nice man in riot gear and body armour and, there was a lot of pushing and shoving The home fans loved it, singing away as you would expect, and the banter between those that I could see was getting more aggressive, and as the whistle went things appeared to kick off in the seated section. Some Cardiff fans appeared from behind the screen (and behind a load of police with camera's) and after a bit of a rush and minor aggravation with the police, Blues fans with WAGs and kids, older people etc. were getting a bit upset and were trying to get out by speaking to the police.

Then the Soul crew appeared outside with their police escort. This got the Zulu's going and there was more pushing and shoving and a few things were thrown. Most Blues fans of course, just sat down and chatted to each another or watched the goings on. After about half an hour or so the police started to let some Blues fans out starting with the one's with kids, couples and older fans and this caused a commotion out side and the gate was closed again. I felt sorry for those who had got out as it reminded me of the time we took 15,000 to Spurs in the cup, and about 200 of us were outside while the rest were locked in, and we took the full force of attacks and abuse from thousands of Spurs fans, with about 20 police trying to keep the sides apart.

My plan was to slip away quietly and get back to the pub for a quick one, but the police were not having any of it and a huge police escort was being assembled outside. My Welsh mate was already in the pub and he texted me every time he went to the bar! I was getting a bit frustrated (and thirsty) and eventually the gates were opened. An hour in a shed is not my idea of a visit to Wales. There was lots of snarling going on from inside the police escort and I managed to slip away telling a copper that my car was parked over the way. It was in fact parked by the museum and I had a 20 minute walk back.

I decided that I'd had enough of Cardiff and jumped in the car and headed up to the midlands. The M5 was at a standstill from below Worcester, so I went home via the scenic route across country not wishing to waste any more drinking time stuck on the motorway. I received loads of texts asking me about the aggro, and to be honest it wasn't all that and I understand the Zulus and the Soul Crew had planned to meet later. A Welsh mate told me that Blues had brought one of the biggest mobs ever to Cardiff.

As you know I tend to concentrate on the fans' experience and mine was great before the game a beer, football chat etc. The Blues were not at the races and didn't deserve to win with finishing like that, and the hospitality of South Wales police totally under whelmed me and many others in the Blues' travelling support.

KRO
Murph

THANKS TO RAGS
MAHONE FOR PICS

TICKET COLLECTION

SOME LOCALS

SOME POLICE

A MATCH, BEST FORGOTTEN

SOME MORE POLICE

BLUE REPOR

Blues 2 CRYSTAL PALACE 1

Blues leapfrogged Crystal Palace to top the Championship table after a last-gasp winner from Sebastian Larsson ensured a 2-1 win for Steve Bruce's men. On an afternoon of drama at St Andrews, Blues came back from a goal down to secure the victory - though that gets nowhere close to describing the events that unfolded, including Bruce being roundly booed by the crowd, captain Damien Johnson throwing both his armband and shirt to the ground and then finally the injury time winner.

So, where to start? The beginning, I guess. Bruce made several changes to the team that were so superb (?) away at Stoke last week. Rahdi Jaidi made his debut at centre half coming in for Olivier Tebily, whilst in midfield Larsson and Fabrice Muamba made way for David Dunn and another debutante in Gary McSheffrey. This meant that McSheffrey started on the left, with Damien Johnson and Mehdi Nafti in the centre of the park, and Dunn played wide right (or started there, but he does tend to drift.) Up front fit-again DJ Campbell replaced Mikael Forssell and partnered Nicklas Bendtner.

Blues started pretty miserably, once again. Crystal Palace were by far the better team early on, combining young hungry players such as Jobi McAnuff (who will be a star - mark my words), Ben Watson and Tom Soares with some decent moves too. Blues now have the young hungry players, but the decent moves were nowhere to be seen. Still, one step at a time and all that. Blues played with absolutely no purpose whatsoever during the opening exchanges and were duly made to pay for this when McAnuff opened the scoring for Palace after 11 minutes. He cut inside from the left, was afforded far too much room, struck a shot with his right foot which may not even have troubled Maik Taylor until a wicked deflection wrong-footed the Blues 'keeper who was left helpless as the Palace fans sang 'we are top of the league!' - perhaps they'd like to have another look at the league table now..?

Blues gradually got a grip on the game, mainly thanks to Nafti and Johnson really taking control of the centre of midfield and starting to play some neat short passes. This got Dunn into the game more, and in turn meant that he was able to link up with McSheffrey who was taking up some very bright positions drifting in from the left. Shortly after Gabor Kiraly - of stupid trousers fame - made a quite sensational safe to deny Jaidi, Blues were on level terms. During a spell of pressure the ball looped out to Nafti on the edge of the area. The Tunisian international ignored 20,000 cries of 'SHOOT!!!' and took the ball down before sliding a superb through ball to Bendtner who in turn "gave Kiraly the eyes", as it's trendy to say, and tucked the ball home neatly.

Kiraly was on hand again to deny McSheffrey a debut goal as Blues really took charge during the midway stage of the first half. However, as half-time approached Blues failed to capitalise on all their possession, let Palace back into it a little bit, and Taylor was forced to claw the ball away from the top corner to deny Jaidi's attempt to emulate that great Jamie Pollock own goal from his Manchester City days.

Anyway, it was the second half when things got interesting and there was some real controversy. After the break Blues were possibly the better team, though Palace still looked a threat on the break. Both teams opened up a little, and proceedings began to oscillate wildly. As Blues toiled trying to break Palace down and nick a crucial goal, substitutions inevitably came into play, and this is where it all kicked off.

Right, the first Blues substitute limbered up, and it was Sebastian Larsson - so, who would come off? To me (and, I suspect, the majority of the crowd) there was only really two candidates given the way Blues were pushing forward and searching for the win - either David Dunn (because of his fitness issues) or Damien Johnson (because although he'd been much better than in previous games this season, he'd given the ball away once or twice in the second half, and because in the 'holding midfielder' role Mehdi Nafti had excelled). So, who did Bruce replace? Nafti, of course. This led to an audible confused mumble from the home fans, but it passed.

So, the second substitute to come on was Neil Danns. Now, here I'd have thought once again that Dunn and Johnson were candidates to go off, but this time goalscorer and tallest forward player (Blues had played a fair few long balls at times) Nicklas Bendtner was replaced leaving just DJ Campbell as a recognised striker on the pitch. This change was greeted by boos from the Blues fans.

(Excuse the lack of reporting on the match at this point, but it was huff and puff, to and fro football as before.)

So, finally the third substitute - Mikael Forssell - stripped off, and on this occasion Damien Johnson's number 22 was shown on the electronic board thing that baffles all fourth officials. This substitution led to a chorus of cheers from the Blues fans. There is no doubt that this was aimed at Johnson, and anyone saying otherwise is kidding themselves. Upon hearing this, Johnson threw his captain's armband to the turf, returned to the bench, being booed as he did so. Once at the bench, he took off his shirt, jogged down the touchline (still being booed) towards the tunnel, and as he approached the tunnel, he threw his shirt onto the pitch in disgust. Seconds after he had disappeared from the arena, a chorus of 'Damien Johnson, what a w****r' started amongst Blues fans.

So, what do I make of that? Firstly, let me state that I think it's disgraceful in various respects - on the part of Johnson and the fans in some ways. Firstly Johnson should quite simply not have done it. He didn't throw his armband down in disgust at being substituted - he did it following the ironic cheers which were aimed at him. Now, this is wrong, but, in the heat of the moment and given his fiery nature, it is perhaps understandable and forgivable. The confusing aspect is that the whole 'shirt throwing' incident was clearly not quite so 'in the heat of the moment'. By the time the shirt was thrown to the turf, Johnson had had about 45 seconds to weigh up his actions, and as a result, this was a little more calculated (he deliberately threw the shirt back onto the pitch). This has really made things difficult for Johnson, and there have to be question marks about his future at the club now. He will undoubtedly be stripped of the captaincy.

The fans too should be ashamed though, because regardless of his performances this season (as I've said, he actually wasn't so bad back in central midfield today) he did not deserve the treatment he got. The ironic cheers were pathetic, and just highlighted that Johnson is an easy target for those fans with short memories and axes to grind with Steve Bruce. As a footballer Johnson is limited, but he single-handedly gave Birmingham City Football Club a shred of dignity in a pathetic attempt to avoid relegation from the Premiership last season, and that shouldn't be forgotten. His actions were pathetic too, don't get me wrong, but he did not deserve that. He deserves any consequences he faces now - he was stupid - but he was only stupid in reaction to at least 8,000 - 10,000 people being braindead in the first place. Maybe the fans were caught up in the heat of the moment too, but it was stupidity all round on the part of everyone concerned.

But, do you know who I blame for the whole thing? Steve Bruce. His persistent selection of Johnson no matter what led to this, and his substitutions today effectively hung Johnson out to dry. Johnson should have been taken off when Nafti was - it's that simple. Had that happened, there would have been nowhere near the amount of ironic cheers that there was - if any. The same could be said of the second substitution. In ignoring Johnson during these first two substitutions, Bruce was effectively drawing attention to his decision to leave Johnson on the pitch. Everyone was now questioning why he was still out there. But to then bring him off with your final substitution was just giving the kid the rope to hang himself. Bruce had already been booed for his substitutions, and some of this booing may have revolved around Johnson remaining on the pitch. If he'd played the 90 minutes, people would have moaned afterwards, but wouldn't have had the opportunity for such a display of fickleness. As soon as his number went up on the board, that was it. Blues had been struggling to break Palace down, so the fans were getting frustrated by that. They were frustrated by Bruce's previous substitutions, and so here was the perfect opportunity to let off steam by taking it all out on Johnson. I'm not defending him - read above, I think he was stupid - but Bruce may as well have dressed him up in an orange boliersuit and got him to hold a sign saying 'TAKE OUT ALL YOUR FRUSTRATIONS ON ME!' the way he exposed Johnson.

And why is Johnson so exposed? Because of Bruce's insistence that he HAS to be in the team. Johnson's a decent enough player at this level, and should be involved, but if Larsson, Dunn, Forssell, Muamba, Bendtner, Danns, etc, etc can all be dropped to the bench, then so can Johnson. The squad's big enough. If Johnson was used like a normal player, he wouldn't be perceived as this evil villain, but as I say, he's not, and it exposes him. He's not great, but he's not bad, and as I said, people should not forget his efforts last season (and the seasons before that). The fans were stupid and then Johnson was stupider, but Bruce has created the situation over a lengthy period of time now, and the reason that the club's captain is now also the most-hated player at the club is down to Steve Bruce himself, I'm afraid. He needs to take some responsibility for what happened, as it's a hell of a difficult situation to manage now.

Anyway, was there a match going on? Oh yes, Crystal Palace or something? So, having sat here and criticised all of Bruce's substitutions, Blues then won the game in injury-time through a substitute in Seb Larsson. Dunn (who I've been saying should have been taken off) did superbly well and pulled the ball back across the face of goal for the young Swede to slide in and place the ball past Kiraly and to send the fans and the Blues bench wild. Dunn shouldn't have been on the pitch and the substitutions were wrong - it shows what I know, huh?

I'm finding it difficult to know what to think about this game. The Johnson thing is obviously a huge side-issue, but the fact is that Blues beat a team who hadn't dropped a point in their opening three games and will be at the right end of the table come May, and in doing so Blues now top the league. Can you really ask for any more than that? I think the problem is though that during the game, things still don't seem right. I'm not going to go on about the substitutions again, but there were also some scary moments for Blues who started poorly and didn't look impressive for periods of the game. In saying that, they did attack very well and with purpose at times, and now Jaidi's in alongside Bruno N'Gotty, for the main part they looked quite solid at the back.

In summary? I'm confused. We were good at times and poor at times. We're not playing well but we're top of the league. Our manager was booed and our captain was the subject of abuse and an insulting song, yet we won against a good side and we've got 10 points out of a possible 12. It's a mad world, as they'd say in Donnie Darko.

Blues 1 Shrewsbury Town 0

Blues continued their unbeaten start to the season and progressed to the second round of the Carling Cup with a 1-0 home win over Shrewsbury Town. A late Sebastian Larsson goal secured Blues' passage to the next stage in a game which saw many 'fringe' players get a welcome run out.

Steve Bruce made ten changes to the team that started against Crystal Palace on Saturday, which is just about as many changes as you can make to a team, other than eleven changes. Rahdi Jaidi was the only survivor from Saturday's starting XI as Colin Doyle made his Blues debut in goal and Martin Taylor came in to partner Jaidi at the heart of the defence. There were a couple of very attacking full-backs in the shape of Larsson and Julian Gray, whilst four central midfielders made up the midfield - Stephen Clemence and Fabrice Muamba obviously won whatever competition was used to determine who could play where they wanted and took up their positions in the middle of the park, whilst Neil Kilkenny went wide right and Neil Danns played wide left. Up front Cameron Jerome partnered Mikael Forssell.

People who didn't see this game and have only seen that Larsson scored late on to secure the win may have the impression that Blues struggled and only just edged past Shrewsbury in a nervy encounter, but the truth is that Blues were as comfortable as slippers. At times they played some excellent football, and otherwise they played good football, and the only problem they had was converting this into goals. Shrewsbury were plucky, which is a word I always think means

'a bit rubbish, but tried hard', and that sums them up really. Maybe 'a bit rubbish' is harsh, as they had a few chances, but they hardly looked very threatening.

Blues started well and could have taken the lead after about 20 seconds when Forssell's shot was deflected over the bar after good work from Larsson. Blues' early dominance was helped by Larsson's excellent attacking play from right back, and by Danns taking control of the midfield - even from out on the left hand side. Gray also joined in well from left back at times.

At the back Jaidi was absolutely immense - I have rarely seen a centre half perform his duties with such ease for 90 minutes. Ok, it was only against Shrewsbury Town, but they still have decent enough players, and Jaidi cruised through the game. Credit must also go to Martin Taylor who nearly matched Jaidi's effortless performance, but whose gangly-ness and flailing arms and legs just don't quite give the same impression. He did well though.

Shrewsbury got themselves into the game a little more as the first half progressed, and Ben Davies maybe should have done better when one-on-one with Doyle, but the young Irish 'keeper saved well with his legs. Blues were still fairly comfortable though, and Danns, Jerome and Muamba all went close before the break.

Jerome and Forssell toiled up front with little reward. Forssell's play around the middle of the park still wasn't up to scratch at times, and he was caught in possession on occasions. However he did look to have a little more sharpness in and around the penalty area - he was shifting the ball into positions to unleash sharp snap shots a lot quicker than he has been of late, which was encouraging. Jerome put himself about and showed some neat touches, but looked a little raw on occasions. Still, he'd only played 4 minutes of football for Blues before tonight, and these things take time.

Shrewsbury had their best real spell of the game early on in the second half as the lively Derek Asamoah become more of an influence with his pace and skill. Again though, they were hardly threatening. They were a bit like one of those small yappy-type dogs who bark and bark and bark, and whilst you appreciate the effort they're making and can pat them on the head in a patronising matter, you've got more chance of being hurt whilst wearing a helmet on a bouncy castle.

Blues clicked back into life a little more once Nicklas Bendtner and DJ Campbell came on to replace Forssell and Jerome. For all the effort of the latter duo, Bendtner and Campbell offered more pace, power and purpose to the Blues attack - Bendtner in particular, who was excellent. Campbell was again impressive too.

Neil Kilkenny - who at times in the first half had looked to overplay things - became more of an influence on the game with the introduction of the more lively front two, and started to take control of the midfield. Stephen Clemence wasn't as impressive, but was alright. Excuse the film reference - if you've never seen 'Zoolander' this will go over your head - but Clemence suffers from the same problem as Derek Zoolander in that he can only turn one way (in Clemence's case onto his left foot) and this limits him quite often deeper in midfield, as he fails to pick the better passes to people by turning his back on the space and turning into trouble.

Blues got their winner shortly after their final substitution was made, with Stephen Kelly replacing Muamba who again looked a mixed bag. I described him as 'raw' after his debut at Sunderland, and I'd stand by that - at times he looks excellent, but at times he looks pretty poor. Anyway, Kelly's introduction meant that Larsson moved upfield to wide right and Kilkenny went into the centre of the park. Within minutes the duo had combined well with Bendtner who found Larsson again superbly and the Swede knocked the ball past Chris McKenzie to make it 1-0. It may have been harsh on McKenzie who had made some good saves, but it was thoroughly deserved by Blues who will have been relieved to have avoided extra time.

After this Blues could well have scored more, with Bendtner, Campbell and Kilkenny taking advantage of the space provided by Shrewsbury chasing the game, but it wasn't to be.

So that was that really - no slip-up, and despite the tight scoreline, no real threat to Blues from Shrewsbury. Their impressive travelling support acknowledged their players' efforts at the end, and they'll probably do well in League 2 this season. Still, in the Championship Blues will also be looking to do well, and such a decent and pleasing-to-the-eye performance without the likes of Nafti, Dunn, McSheffrey, N'Gotty, Sadler, Johnson and with Campbell and Bendtner only starting on the bench bodes well for the future.

ROD

I've always wanted to write an article about Rod Hull, and this is my chance. First of all, you have to ask yourself if it's in bad humour to laugh about said pink-clad windmill-living puppeteer's death, following his climb on the roof to adjust the aerial to watch the match. It is? Even if he was a Man U fan? Oh. OK.

I'm not laughing then. I guess if Rod Hull's off the agenda, I guess I'll have to discuss Hull City instead.

First, though, I suggested in the last MIB that I'd be talking about the arrival of Gary McSheffrey in this issue. I was right. He did indeed arrive. He seems lively too, though it's a pity he hasn't found the back of the net yet. In fact, Dudley Campbell's the only non-loanee who's scored for us from open play so far this season. McSheffrey seems to have been given the left wing berth, which is fair enough considering he did well for Coventry from there, but he seems to have 'conveniently' plugged two holes at the same time (don't worry Ed, I'm not going THAT way in this issue!). 'McSheff', 'McSheffster' 'McShevchenko' or 'Sheffers' as I've seen him referred to is keeping Julian Gray out of the left wing spot, but seems also to be our fifth striker. To be fair, he seems a better prospect than Gray, and would probably not be in my chosen two starting strikers anyway. I'm not going to go into Steve Bruce's team selections here, I'm sure my fellow contributors will be doing that for me in this issue. It's interesting to note, however, that McSheff has played more games for Coventry this season than he has for Blues. I just hope that doesn't last very long. Welcome to the Blues, GMS.

Anyway, Hull. Nicky Forster has arrived, so there'll be cheers around the ground for him and Craig Fagan amidst the 'who?'s. I wouldn't have thought these two would be 'doing an AJ' though. As you read, we're sat in fourth spot, with Hull rock bottom of the Championship. They've shipped eight goals, and scored three. Jon Parkin scored all three, so Jaidi and N'Gotty are going to have to do their job on him, and we should be fine. Michael Bridges has also arrived from Bristol City, but we surely can't be afraid of him with our Premiership standard defence? I do wonder if it'll be Forster and Fagan to start, simply cos they're ex-Blues. Either way, hopefully we can win by more than a two goal margin and give out the right signal to this division. A loss would be unacceptable to everyone from the Board down to the fans, so hopefully we'll have a really good spectacle to witness. We're 3:2 favourites to win this game and I think they're pretty generous odds so I may well be having a flutter on it myself. I'd be sticking Jerome and Bendtner up front, with Forssell on the bench until he can prove himself in open play. Hopefully before January, when Bendtner's likely to be leaving!! DJC will likely be on the bench too, as he offers a midfield option as well. It seems as though Maik's fit again, though not entirely convincing for Northern Ireland. After Doyle's performance against Cardiff, I can't imagine Maik being anywhere but defending our

HULL

goals against Hull. Doyle obviously has a way to go yet, but should be kept on his toes, by the arrival of Artur Krysiak. Stolen from under the noses of Arsenal themselves, as the Blues 'did a West Ham' ...... erm, nearly. I hope Damien Johnson repays our faith in him, after we refused to let him go to the Hammers to be sat on the bench at best!! Julian Gray and Martin Taylor were widely tipped to be heading for Wolves too, so it seems they may have a part to play this season. I'd have thought Taylor will be on the bench today, to cover Tebily, who's likely to take the injured Kelly's place. A lot of fans would rather see DJ drop into the right back spot, but I can't see it happening.

I'd imagine Nafti will get the nod to start with Dunn, DJ and McSheff in midfield, with Danns on the bench. If Danns aint even on the bench, you'd have to ask why we bothered buying him. Again, I'll not go into that issue here.

We've got QPR away next, who are without the loaned-out Stefan Moore. Paul Furlong still has goals in him, so I imagine he'll be the dangerous 'ex-Blue' in this match. I wonder how many Championship teams DON'T have a player who used to play for us? Answers on a postcard or sealed envelope.....

Marcus Bignot may well have a point to prove as well, former BCFC Ladies manager. Let's hope we don't give him too many excuses to wave his finger at the Board, though I'm sure he'll be tempted even if not playing in the team. Zesh Rehman was linked with a move to Blues, so we'd best hope Nicklas and Cameron keep an eye out for him, as we don't want another 'what if' story. Hopefully our forward line will run rings around him, and we'll all be glad we didn't end up with him. Actually, a lot of mates of mine were glad we didn't get him anyway! Rangers aren't faring too much better than Hull at the moment, languishing 14 places below the Blues, with only one win under their belts so far this season - against a surprising positive looking Southend United side. Mind you, Southend's win against Sunderland was before Roy Keane's arrival...think of that what you will.

Once again, the fans will be expecting three points, which is a pretty big ask when you look at our recent away performances (and not too recent ones too!). I'll stick my neck out and back us for a win too, but expect Brucey to be more defensive in this one, so a 0-2 win will do nicely. Anything but another Arsenal-inspired rescue please Blues!

Anyway, last issue I had the transfer window deadline to look forward to. Now it's gone, I can't help but feel a little deflated. If Bruce and Sullivan were so confident in the players we had, why were we bothering looking at Marcus Bent? And how did we know we were looking at Marcus Bent, following the Board's statement to the effect that they would no longer be revealing transfer targets? Hmm. The only possibility is further loan signings before January. Let's hope we don't develop another injury crisis and need them....

Hopefully we'll be on 16 points come the Ipswich issue. As usual, thanks for reading and Keep Right On!

Russell Dempsey
http://www.myspace.com/russelldempsey

SQUADS vs

For a change, there weren't any impulse buys at the FA Department Store on August 31st, and other than the quiet arrival of young Polish keeper Krysiak, our dealings in the transfer market were concluded a couple of weeks ago with the acquisition of Gary McSheffrey. The late-night stab at getting the services of Todorov came to nothing, and he has headed up the M6 to join Heskey at Rugby-Town FC.

To comfort us all though, David Sullivan announced in the press that he thought the new-look squad was "very, very good" and that he believed that Steve Bruce "wouldn't change the squad for any other."

To give them their due, the Board have bought in nine first-team players since May's mass exodus; some permanent, some loanees, most substantially younger than the average age of last season's team, and in some cases, the "star" player from their outgoing teams. We have experienced defenders, vibrant teenagers on missions to prove themselves, and proven goalscorers.

Following the sad but inevitable departure of Jermaine Pennant, many have been concerned about losing more of our decent players, and there was a lot of nervousness in the last couple of days of August. Late rumours about the departure of Forssell were unfounded, and at least until January we can all heave a collective sigh of relief. Whether he, Dunn (who is in the last year of his contract) and Matty Upson will stay beyond January will largely depend on results and our position in the league.

So, we may well have one of the best player line-ups in the Championship at the moment, in terms of numbers and ability. Sullivan has bragged that not only do we have the strength in depth, we probably have more wherewithal than many of our league-mates to pay the best wages. Money talks in this game. Sorted.

Or maybe not. Is having the best squad a guarantee to having the best team?

Not in the slightest; think back to June and the World Cup. Anything less than a semi-final place would be abject failure, and the ultimate fantasy footy experience of an England – Germany final was a mouthwatering prospect.

The Golden Generation: the best we'

TEAMS

The England squad that trooped off to Germany, (borne by British Airways and our dreams of victory), were the Golden Generation; the best we'd had since 1966, and some of the best players in the world.

Gerrard, Lampard, Terry, Rooney... players that any club would for their own; at the peak of their prowess (give or take the odd metatarsal), hungry for success, gagging to hold up the Jules Rimet trophy and end the forty years of hurt for millions of English fans.

The cookie didn't crumble quite that way, and the fans watched eleven players huffing and puffing in the heat, often failing to put a decent sequence of passes together, failing to hit the target, and ultimately failing the test of nerves that is the penalty shoot-out, apart from the boo-boys' target Owen Hargreaves, who in the space of a few weeks changed millions of minds about him.

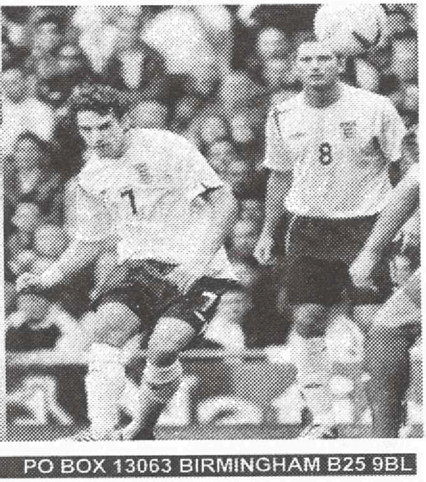
Sadly, England's overall performance in the 2006 World Cup will probably go down in history as one of the most spectacular underachievement of the decade.

The players were, and still are, a fantastic squad of individuals; the cream of this country and the envy of many a club and national manager.

That's where it went wrong though; they were a squad and not a team; twenty-three individuals who never quite got their acts together.

And in a parallel universe in Birmingham, there seems to be something very similar going on. Our squad is just that – a squad, a bunch of players, and at the moment they are not convincing because they are not a team.

had since 1966, and some of the best players in the world.



There have been many debates on radio and the websites in the last weeks or two about precisely who our best eleven are, and there's an uncomfortable feeling in the air that Steve Bruce doesn't know who his best eleven are either.

Unfortunately, while SB is in the dugout doing Ranieri impressions, the players also aren't going to know who the best eleven are, and while the fans watch the tinkering, all we are going to get is that nasty deja-vu feeling that we've all come to know and fear over the past couple of seasons.

Starting line-ups are still depressingly cautious; two defensive midfielders with David Dunn pushed out wide when his talents suit the middle of the pitch. Players like Danns left on the bench when attack would be the best form of... well, attack(!); Kilkenny, undoubtedly one of last season's gems, unable to get into the team for anything other than a Carling Cup tie, and uncertainty over the best strike partnership.

Bruce is interested in player versatility, and always seems to rub his hands in glee when a player appears who can fill in a number of different positions. The downside of this is that they often don't get the opportunity to play in the position that suits them best; witness the astounding change in Larsson when he was released from defence to midfield in the Shrewsbury game. Although he is capable of playing in the back row, it's blindingly obvious that he excels in a midfield role when he is free to get into the penalty box.

It also seems fairly obvious that if players are constantly shuffled into unfamiliar positions, they are not going to play their best game and will quickly get fed-up; team spirit will deteriorate and the results will quickly suffer.

When interviewed by the media, our players seem to have a very good idea of what their strengths and weaknesses are, so why on earth doesn't someone on the coaching staff take some notice of them? Forssell is crying out to have the ball played into his feet after a season of watching it whizzing over his head. No wonder the guy is looking frustrated on the pitch.

We as fans need to know that Steve Bruce knows who his best eleven are, where to play them, and how to motivate them, or they will just become a disjointed bunch of players that will fail to give of their best. Many people would argue that this is precisely why we have not been convincing, even in victory, so far this season.

The loss against Cardiff hurt. Nobody was expecting them to roll over and offer us an easy 3-0, but it was a game of disappointments, missed targets and underachievement. No disrespect to Cardiff, but there will be harder matches this season, and to gain automatic promotion we can probably only afford to lose about six games in total, which makes cementing the team NOW an absolute necessity.

Ms B is News and Features Editor for www.vbbfootball.com, Blues Blogger for BBC Birmingham and a member of the Observer Fans' panel.

The Blues Prayer

(another one)

Our fathers favourite eleven,

Blues be thy name.

The goals will come,

Promotion will be won,

In Birmingham,

As it was in Cardiff.

Give us a few goals from
Jeromes head,

And give DJ a few good
passes,

As we stop others from
passing against us.

And lead us to the top of
every table,

But deliver us a proper
royal Blues kit.

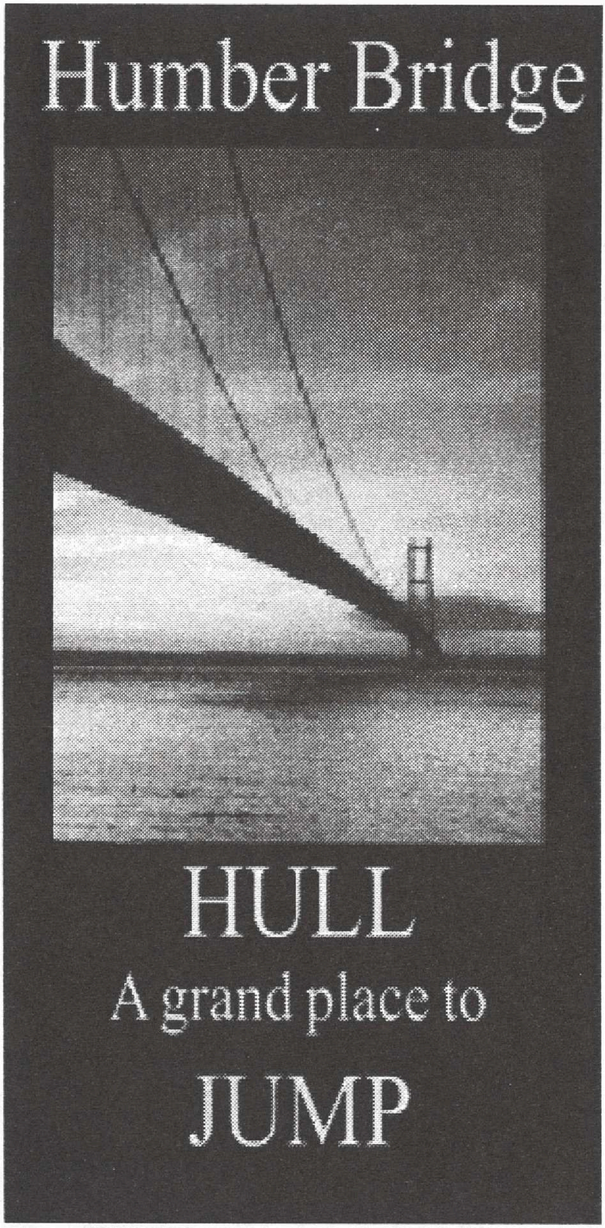
For St Andrews is the
kingdom,

Dunn is the power,

Ours is the glory,

For ever and ever.

Amen!!



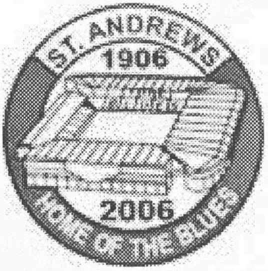
**Gabbie Trivia Question -
Answer: Billy Kerr - Sunderland
1973**

BADGES

NEW BADGES ALWAYS AVAILABLE ON MIB BADGE BOARDS

Another new season, and loads of new badges for all you Bluenoses to purchase. This season I am trying to bring out a new badge for every weekend home match. There will be great new Blues designs & new England badges as well. Prices are being pegged again so each badge will cost £2.00, or you can purchase 3 for a fiver.

So, keep your Bluenose eyes peeled for new badges on sale from your friendly MIB sellers.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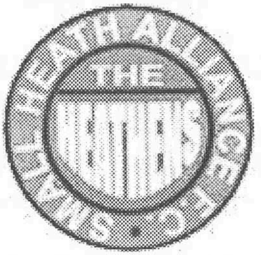
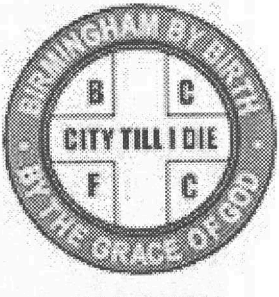
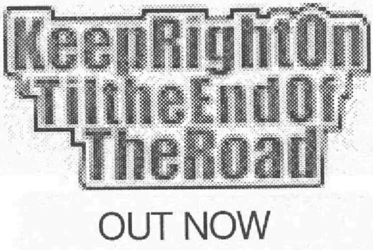

SMALL HEATH ALLIANCE F.C.
THE
HEATHENS

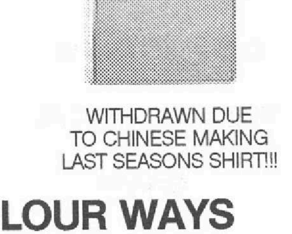
OUT NOW


BIRMINGHAM BY BIRTH
B
C
CITY TILL I DIE
F
C
BY THE GRACE OF GOD

OUT NOW


KeepRightOn
TiltheEndOf
TheRoad

OUT NOW

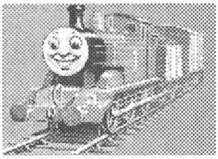


WITHDRAWN DUE
TO CHINESE MAKING
LAST SEASONS SHIRT!!!

ALL BADGES IN LOTS OF COLOUR WAYS

Thomas the Tank Engine

(It seems that Rob who drinks in The Sportsmans had a nightmare journey home to Reading after the Palarse game, is nightmarish he sent this joke in)



Funny as !!!!

A mother was working in the kitchen, listening to her five-year-old son playing with his new electric train in the living room. She heard the train stop and her son saying, "All of you b*****ds who want off, get the f**k off now, cause we're in a hurry! And all of you b*****ds who are getting on, get the f**k on, cause we're going down the tracks"..

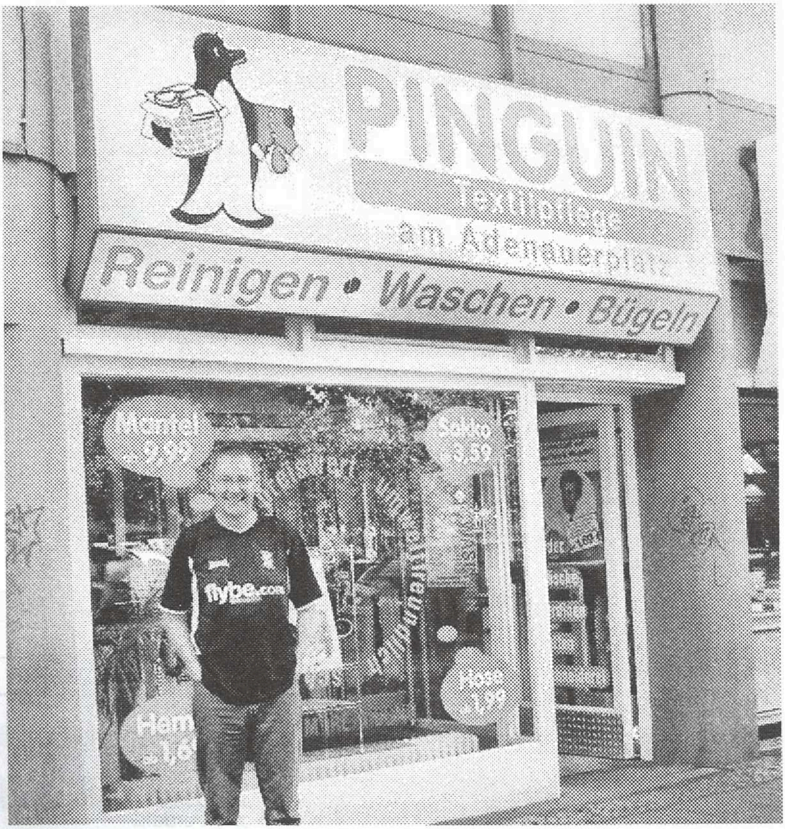
The horrified mother went in and told her son, "We don't use that kind of language in this house. Now I want you to go to your room and stay there for TWO HOURS. When you come out, you may play With your train, but I want you to use nice language."

Two hours later, the son came out of the bedroom and resumed playing with his train. Soon the train stopped and the mother heard her son say, "All passengers who are disembarking the train, please remember to take all of your belongings with you. We thank you for travelling with us today and hope your trip was a pleasant one."

She hears the little boy continue, "For those of you just boarding, we ask you to stow all of your hand luggage under Your seat. Remember, there is no smoking on the train. We hope you will have a pleasant and relaxing Journey with us today."

As the mother began to smile, the child added..........

"For those of you who are pi**ed off about the



Monsieur le Clown (Mulv) outside Blues' club shop in Berlin .

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AND DON'T MISS OUT

Blues are back in a lower division though we are all still paying Premier League prices. In the last issue of 2005/06 I was seriously considering putting the price of MIB. That has not happened though, the price is still a pound, and you can still purchase MIB through a subscription. Below are this seasons prices. So if you don't want to miss out, bloody well get subscribing

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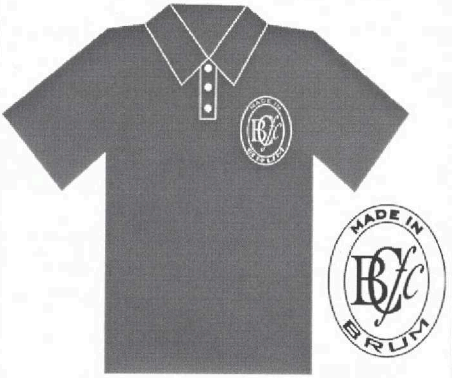

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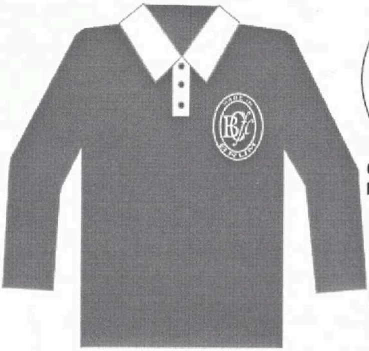

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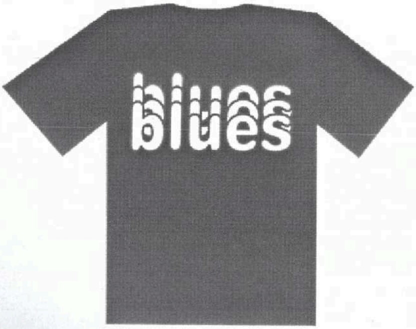

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birmingham in my heart

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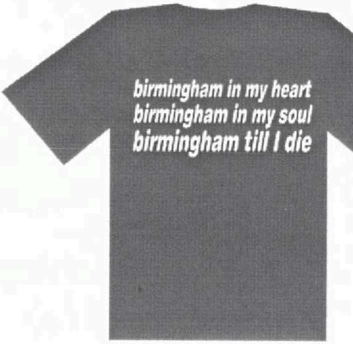

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